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ABSTRACT

Recent empirical research identifies a potential area of both role and organizational conflict for the middle school principal and perhaps all principals. Findings from a role norm inventory reveal that middle school principals do not perceive the relative importance of disciplining pupils, while teachers--significant members of their role sector--accord this particular role behavior considerable weight. While differing significantly in their rankings of a general listing of pupil personnel role behaviors, middle school principals, teachers, and counselors demonstrated a degree of consensus on selected items relating to the principal's authority in matters of organizational control. Implications for administrative practice, research, and theory are explored. (Author)

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ORGANIZATIONAL CONTROL AND THE MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL: MAN/WOMAN IN THE MIDDLE

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Recent empirical research identifies a potential area of both role and organizational conflict for the middle school principal and perhaps all principals. Findings from a role norm inventory reveal that middle school principals do not perceive the relative importance of disciplining pupils, while teachers - significant members of their role sector - accord this particular role behavior considerable weight. While differing significantly in their rankings of a general listing of pupil personnel role behaviors, middle school principals, teachers, and counselors demonstrated a degree of consensus on selected items relating to the principal's authority in matters of organizational control. Implications for administrative practice, research and theory are explored.

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ORGANIZATIONAL CONTROL AND THE MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL:

MAN/WOMAN IN THE MIDDLE

The literature treating the role of the middle school principal is at best hortatory and at worst ambiguous. Following an exhaustive review of this literature, particularly as it relates to the pupil personnel functions of the middle school, Skinkus has observed that "since the middle school organization has not been established as long as the elementary school, junior high school and senior high school forms of organization, operating procedures in the middle schools have not yet been firmly established."[1]

Following the empirical research by Gross, Mason and McEachern on role consensus as it relates to the superintendency,[2] several studies have been made by Foskett focusing on role consensus and the elementary principal and the elementary teacher.[3]

The conceptual importance of the Gross, Mason and McEachern and the Foskett studies was to demonstrate empirically that role consensus (previously considered a postulate) as a variable could be used to explain and predict role conflict and other phenomena within the context of role theory, thus expanding the

scope of this body of theory.

Among other things, Skinkus has found that role dissensus or relative lack of consensus points to some possible problem areas in leader behavior with regard to the middle school principalship, particularly in expectations for the exercise of organizational authority or control.[4]

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTROL

There is a developing literature on organizational control, particularly as it relates to the school, to which the findings from the Skinkus research contribute.

As Etzioni points out, all social units have a structure and control their members, but organizations have a distinct structure and their problem of control is especially acute. The participants need to be supervised, the supervisors themselves need supervision, and so on, all the way to the top of the organization. In this sense, the organizational structure is one of control, and the hierarchy of control is the most central element of the organizational structure.[5]

Invoking the concept of bureaucracy in analyzing the educational organization, Anderson has studied various functional dilemmas of organizational authority and control in schools.[6]

Willower and others[7] have found that attitudes toward humanistic or custodial control of students - Pupil Control

Ideology - differentiate between and among principals, teachers, and guidance counselors, purportedly due to position in the hierarchy of the organization with reference to proximity to the school's unselected clientele. Pupil Control Behavior - PCB - similarly has been found to be related to Pupil Control Ideology (PCI).[8]

Brumbaugh has presented some evidence in support of the theory that incumbents of all superordinate roles throughout the entire hierarchy of an organization employ a control orientation in viewing the results of interaction between themselves and their immediate subordinates.[9] He suggests that the findings of Willower et al., the findings of Gilbert and Levinson,[10] and the findings of Kahn et al.,[11] support this expanded view of organizational control. In more recent research, Flango and Brumbaugh have found that rule tropism - i.e., attitudes toward controlling students - is a factor predictive of administrator and faculty selection of a bargaining agent during collective negotiations in a public college and university system.[12]

The findings from the research conducted by Skinkus contribute to this developing body of literature on organizational control.

THE STUDY

Designed to determine what specific pupil personnel behaviors were considered high, middle, or low priority role expectations for middle school principals, counselors, and teachers, Skinkus devised a mailed questionnaire comprised of two parts - Part I, a Q-sort and Part II, a Likert scale - aimed at obtaining subject responses to fifty item statements. These item statements consisted of a list of role expectations for the positions of middle school principal, counselor and teacher. The list of fifty items was compiled from an exhaustive content analysis of the literature on the middle school, a list subsequently validated by a panel of judges expert in the middle school concept. Examples of some of the fifty items included in this list are as follows:

> Encouraging pupils to utilize counseling services.
>
> Modifying pupil attitudes through the use of positive, non-threatening techniques.
>
> Resolving interpersonal conflicts between pupils.
>
> Disciplining pupils who are problem behavior cases.
>
> Explaining school policies and regulations to pupils.
>
> Developing favorable attitudes toward the guidance program among teachers.

In Part I of the questionnaire, respondents were requested to Q-sort the fifty item statements according to the five

behavior expectations that they considered generally most important, the ten behavior expectations that they considered generally very important, the ten behavior expectations that they considered probably unimportant, and the five behavior expectations that they considered definitely unimportant. Responses in the Q-sort were given the following values:

> Those items designated as "most important" were given a value of 3.
>
> Those items designated as "very important" were given a value of 10.
>
> Those items designated as "probably unimportant" were given a value of 40.
>
> Those items designated as "definitely unimportant" were given a value of 48.

Any of the remaining fifty items which respondents did not include in the Q-sort categories were given a value of 25, for the scoring was designed to have responses in each Q-sort column with equal value. For example, the five responses in the "most important" category would have had a value range of from one to five and so were weighted as a median value of three for each. In like manner, the ten responses in the "very important" category would have had a value range of from six to fifteen and were accordingly weighted at a median value of ten for each, and so on.

In Part II of the questionnaire, the fifty items were arranged in a Likert scale response format (ranging from definitely unimportant, probably unimportant, relatively important,

very important, and most important, with scoring weight values of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively) which asked respondents to rate each item's relative importance for the principal, counselor, and teacher.

Eighty-nine middle schools in Pennsylvania were solicited through their respective school district superintendents for participation in the study. Of this group, fifty-six consented to provide data.

Skinkus chose to apply his instruments to all principals and assistant principals in the fifty-six participating middle schools and to all the counselors. A twenty per cent random sample of teachers in the middle schools was established through the use of a table of random numbers applied to the rosters of teacher personnel of the schools.

A packet of research instruments was mailed to the principal of each of the fifty-six middle schools. Each packet contained a letter giving directions for the administration of the instruments. A list of the potential respondents was included in the packet, as well as a self-addressed return envelope.

FINDINGS

Most principals responded favorably to the first mailing of the packet of instruments and distributed, collected, and

returned the questionnaires to the researcher. Fourteen follow-up telephone calls were made to collect packets not returned. A total of 74 percent of the questionnaires mailed were completed and returned.

From the original 79 instruments mailed to middle school principals and their assistant principals, 71 percent were found useable in the data analyses. From the original 56 instruments mailed to middle school counselors, 80 percent were found useable in the data analyses. From the original 437 instruments mailed to middle school teachers, 76 percent were found useable in the data analyses.

The first null hypothesis tested by Skinkus was the following:

> There will be no significant congruence in the perceptions of pupil personnel role behaviors of principals, counselors, and teachers.

The Q-sort response data from the principals, counselors, and teachers in Part I of the questionnaire were analyzed using Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance.[13]

$$W = \frac{12\ S}{K^2(n^3 - n)}$$

In the calculation of S:

$$S = Ex^2 - \frac{(Ex_t)^2}{n}$$

Ex^2 = sum of the square of the sum of the ranks

Ex_t = sum of the ranks

n = number of rankings

k = number of objects being ranked.

To test the significance of the concordance coefficient, it was necessary to generate an F ratio as follows:[14]

$$F = \frac{(K - 1) W}{1 - W}$$

Using the formula for Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance on the data for the 44 principals who had responded to the questionnaire, a concordance of .24 and an F ratio of 15.05 were generated. The null hypothesis was rejected at the .001 level - congruence of perceptions of pupil personnel role behaviors among principals is significant.

Similarly, using the formula for Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance for the 39 counselors who had responded, a concordance of .37 and an F ratio of 22.30 were found. The null hypothesis was rejected at the .001 level - congruence among counselors is significant.

Again, for the 272 teachers who had responded, a concordance of .22 and an F ratio of 71.24 were found. The null hypothesis was rejected at the .001 level - congruence among teachers is significant.

Finally, Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance was generated among the principals, counselors, and teachers with a resulting concordance of .23 and an F ratio of .585. The F ratio did not attain the .05 level of confidence, indicating

no significant congruence of perceptions of role behaviors among principals, counselors, and teachers.

While agreeing within their own individual groups, principals, teachers and counselors disagreed with each other with regard to their rank orderings of the general importance of the fifty role behaviors. For example, item ten deals with "Disciplining pupils who are problem behavior cases." By ranking this role behavior twelfth, teachers apparently considered this behavior very important. Principals, on the other hand ranked it twenty-third, considering it only of relative importance, while counselors ranked the behavior in fiftieth position, considering it as the least important pupil personnel role behavior.

The second hypothesis tested by Skinkus was the following:

> There will be no significant differences among principals', counselors', and teachers' perceptions of the role of the principal in the pupil personnel program.

The summed responses of the principals, counselors, and teachers to the Likert scale of fifty items in Part II of the questionnaire were analyzed using analysis of variance.[15]

$$F = \frac{\frac{SSb}{dfb}}{\frac{SSw}{dfw}}$$

$$SSb = \frac{(\text{sum of col. 1})^2}{\text{no. in column}} + \frac{(\text{sum of col. 2})^2}{\text{no. in column}} + \cdots$$

$$\frac{(\text{sum of last col.})^2}{\text{no. in column}} - \frac{(\text{sum of sums})^2}{\text{no. in column}}$$

$$SSw = (\text{sum of squares in col. 1}) - \frac{(\text{sum of col. 1})^2}{\text{no. in column}} +$$

$$(\text{sum of squares in col. 2}) - \frac{(\text{sum of col. 2})^2}{\text{no. in column}} +$$

$$(\text{sum of squares in last col.}) - \frac{(\text{sum of last col.})^2}{\text{no. in column}}$$

With an F ratio equal to 10.777, the null hypothesis was rejected at the .001 level of significance. There are significant differences among principals', counselors', and teachers' perceptions of the role of the principal in the middle school pupil personnel program. Data used in this calculation are shown in Table 1. Principals, teachers and counselors disagree with regard to their rank orderings of the fifty role behaviors concerning the responsibilities of the principal.

Table 1

Comparison of Role Perceptions of

Middle School Principals, Counselors, and Teachers

Treatment Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Principals	56	191.482	22.706
Counselors	45	180.600	23.932
Teachers	304	175.694	23.627
Total	405	178.422	24.159

In an analysis of these data at the item level, however, it was discovered that, while dissensus prevailed among these three groups in their perceptions of the role of the middle

school principal in general, a remarkable degree of consensus prevailed among them when it came to items relating to directing or controlling on the part of the principal.

While differing in their views as to the general importance of these role behaviors, principals, teachers, and counselors did agree on who should exercise these responsibilities. Principals, for example, on the item referring to "disciplining pupils who are problem behavior cases," rated themselves (4.51 mean value) as most important in the performance of this role behavior; teachers (4.22 mean value) rated it as definitely important in their performance of it; and counselors (2.25 mean value) rated it as probably unimportant in their performance of it.

Counselors concurred with the performer ratings, and rated principals (4.51 mean value) most important in performing this role behavior, while rating it (1.73 mean value) probably unimportant as a role behavior for themselves, and rating it (3.98 mean value) as very important as a role behavior for teachers.

Teachers concurred with the principal rating (4.49 mean value), and the teacher rating (4.18 mean value). Parenthetically, teachers rated the counselors (3.18 mean value) of higher importance in the disciplining of problem behavior cases than counselors rated themselves.

This same general pattern - i.e., consensus on the exercise of controlling-directing role behaviors for the principal - was revealed in an analysis of the additional following items:

Directing members of the educational staff toward a pupil-centered program instead of a subject-centered program.

Explaining school policies and regulations to pupils.

Directing the content and the administration of the school testing program.

Checking reasons for pupil absence from school.

Evaluating the effectiveness of the co-curricular program in meeting students' needs.

Evaluating the guidance program.

Establishing an activity program for the middle school.

Directing a middle school student council.

DISCUSSION

The foregoing data indicate that principals, counselors and teachers, while evidencing consensus within their respective groups concerning the priority rankings of role behaviors for the middle school pupil personnel program, demonstrate dissensus or a relative lack of consensus between and among themselves on the same priorities. Such a finding may well indicate that each professional group does indeed act as a kind of reference group for the individual principal, counselor and teacher, thus influencing their attitudes, and in effect perhaps socializing them, toward the enactment of their respective organizational roles. The importance of reference group theory in analyzing

and understanding potential sources of organizational and role conflict in schools has been noted elsewhere.[16]

The empirical finding that middle school teachers accord significantly higher weight than do principals (and counselors) to the role behavior of "disciplining pupils who are problem behavior cases" squares with research done by Willower and others on pupil control ideology.[17] It also points to a possible potential area of role and organizational conflict, perhaps not only for the middle school principal, but for principals in general. If principals are reluctant to acknowledge the importance of this particular function of authority which the office or position of principal implies, then the necessary flow of more encompassing organizational control may be imperiled.

Moreover, maintenance by incumbents of a kind of role distance from or ambivalence toward this particular authority function of the principalship may contribute to inauthenticity in the enactment of the role of principal, as perceived by teachers and others. Brumbaugh, Halpin and Seeman have commented on this phenomenon.[18]

Finally, the fact that middle school principals evidenced some ambivalence in viewing the importance of disciplining pupils may demonstrate the need for preparation programs in educational administration to address themselves to ways of instilling in their students an awareness of the organizational

need for the authority function in the role of the principalship. Equally important for such programs may be to explore the various ways in which this organization control function can be exercised acceptably within the ethos of current American society.

NOTES

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11. R.F. Kahn, D.M. Quinn, R.P. Snoek, and J. Diedrick, Organizational Stress: Studies in Role Conflict and Ambiguity (New York: John Wiley, 1964).

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13. For example, see M.W. Tate and R.C. Clelland, Nonparametric and Shortcut Statistics (Danville, Illinois: Interstate Printers and Publishers, Inc.,1957),p. 19.

14. For example, see F.N. Kerlinger, Foundations of Behavioral Research (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1964), p. 270.

15. D. Ary, L.C. Jacobs and A. Razavieh, Introduction to Research in Education (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1972), p. 145.

16. For example, see R.B. Brumbaugh, "Local-Cosmopolitan Orientation and Teacher Attitudes toward Reorganization," Administrator's Notebook, XII (March, 1964), pp. 1-4.

17. Willower et al., The School and Pupil Control Ideology.

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